

Images of Motherhood and Self in Byzantine Literature

PETER HATLIE

Good narratives about mothers and motherhood are a fairly scarce commodity in Byzantine literature. As a general rule, brief and passing remarks about mothers and their world are far more commonly found in sources than are lengthy and detailed narratives that take a Byzantine mother as their central theme. While it is true that reading between the lines of extant texts may reveal quite a bit about the lives of Byzantine mothers, the figures in question still remain behind the scenes and idealized, the details of their lives thus typically reduced to a series of fragments, generalities, and stereotypes.¹ Byzantine treatments of notable biblical mothers, such as the Virgin Mary and her own mother Anna, were more generous, of course.² For Byzantine

mothers proper, on the other hand, extant sources remain few and elusive.³

This pattern of representation applies to mothers of all sorts, including those who would eventually be honored with sainthood,⁴ those whose would-be primary definition as a mother was overshadowed by

✎ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 39th spring symposium of Byzantine studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 4 April 2005. My thanks to Professor Margaret Mullett for the invitation and to Professor Leslie Brubaker for both moderating the session and commenting on the paper. Furthermore I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the anonymous readers of this article, to Dr. Maryanne Kowaleski, and to my wife Dr. Barbara Roggema, for their helpful advice and corrections.

1 ODB 3:2203; A. Kazhdan, "Women at Home," *DOP* 52 (1998): 1–2. See, e.g., the parents described in the *Vita of Thomaïs of Lesbos* (BHG 2454), in *AASS, Nov. IV*, ed. H. Delehaye (Brussels, 1925), 234b–237d, Eng. trans. P. Halsall, in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. A.-M. Talbot (Washington, DC, 1996), 299–304.

2 See, inter alia, I. Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became 'Meter Theou,'" *DOP* 44 (1990): 165–72; V. Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London, 1994); M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother*

of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art (Milan, 2000). For St. Anna, see S. E. J. Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *DOP* 52 (1998): 96–98. For some martyr mothers (e.g., Julitta, of SS. Cyricus and Julitta) and the Maccabees' mother Salomona, see L. Drewer, "Saints and Their Families in Byzantine Art," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 4, no. 16 (1991–92): 260–62.

3 See, e.g., A. Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *JÖB* 31, no. 1 (1981): 234–37 and eadem, "Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," *ByzF* 9 (1985): 65–68; A.-M. Talbot, "Women," in *The Byzantines*, ed. G. G. Cavallo, trans. T. Dunlap, T. Lavender Fagan, and C. Lambert (Chicago–London, 1997), 121–28; J. Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women," in *Women in Ancient Societies*, eds. L. Archer, S. Fischler, and M. Wyke (New York, 1994), 185–87; eadem, "L'enseignement maternel à Byzance," in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VI^e–XI^e siècles)*, eds. S. Lebecq et al. (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1999), 91–102; B. Hill, "Imperial Women and the Ideology of Womanhood in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. L. James (London–New York, 1997), 82–86; C. L. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (New Haven, 2004), 149–53. For some of the art historical evidence, see Drewer, "Saints and Their Families," 260–68.

4 E.g., *Vita of Matrona* (BHG 1221), in *AASS, Nov. III* (Rome, 1910), 790–813, Eng. trans. by J. Featherstone and C. Mango, in *Holy Women of Byzantium* (n. 1 above), 13–64. For an analysis of this and similar *vitae*, see E. Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance," *StMed* 17 (1976): 597–623.

other roles they played in politics and society,⁵ and finally those who dedicated their adult years to living in a household and caring for their children. For this last group—what we might call ordinary mothers⁶—the sources are particularly sparse. The present article nevertheless focuses on this aspect of the literature on motherhood, given that the more detailed accounts of ordinary mothers we have in hand, though few in number, seem to be carefully crafted and are quite rich with meaning and significance. Very little of the “real life” of Byzantine mothers emerges from these texts, and that in turn reduces their value in purely historical terms. Yet the accounts are interesting both as a demonstration of Byzantine literary skill and interests and as a window into the thought-world of Byzantium.⁷ Some sense of “the social role of sophistry,” similar to that which Tim Whitmarsh has identified for the Second Sophistic, also emerges in a study of these accounts.⁸

Sources and Approach

This study has identified ten significant texts, offering portraits of nine different Byzantine mothers. This body of material was written over the course of about

one thousand years and composed in a variety of rhetorical genres:

1. Gregory of Nazianzus's *Funeral Oration for His Father Gregory* and *Funeral Oration for His Sister Gorgonia*, both of which speak about his mother Nonna (fourth century)⁹
2. Chorikios of Gaza's *Funeral Oration for Maria, Mother of the Bishops Marcianus and Anastasios* (sixth century)¹⁰
3. the *Vita of Martha*, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger (sixth to seventh century)¹¹
4. the *Vita of Alypios*, whose anonymous mother plays a big role (seventh century)¹²
5. Theodore of Stoudios's *Funeral Oration for His Mother Theoktiste* (ninth century)¹³
6. Niketas of Amnia's *Vita of Philaretos the Merciful*, whose wife Theosebo is richly characterized (ninth century)¹⁴
7. Michael Psellos's *Encomium of His Mother Theodote* (eleventh century)¹⁵
8. Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, which includes a history of Anna's mother Irene Doukaina

5 See, e.g., J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, 1992); idem, “Helena Augusta: Exemplary Christian Empress,” *StP* 25 (1993): 85–90; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London, 1999), 73–94; J. Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London, 2002), 51–129.

6 “Ordinary” here and in what follows refers to mothers who are (a) primarily identified with raising children and the life of the household, not with politics and activities of the imperial court, nor with religion and the call of the monastic life, nor with society and the demands of charity, etc., and (b) ordinary people in the sense of being normal humans, i.e., neither workers of miracles, nor possessed by demons, nor apparently a mere literary figure without an underlying personal history. My sense of “ordinary” does not contemplate differences in social class and status.

7 For “thought-world,” see among numerous other studies, N. B. Baynes, “The Thought-World of East Rome,” in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 24–46; C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (New York, 1980), 8 and 149–229 passim; A. P. Kazhdan, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC, 1982), 96–109 passim.

8 T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, Greece and Rome, New Surveys in Classics No. 35 (Oxford, 2005), 38–40.

9 *Oration* 18, in PG 35:985–1044; *Oration* 8, in *Discours* 6–12, ed. and trans. M. A. Calvet-Sébasti, SC 405 (Paris, 1995), 246–98.

10 In *Choricii Gazaei Opera*, ed. R. Foerster and E. Richteg (Stuttgart, 1972), 99–109.

11 BHG 1174, in *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune* (521–592), 2 vols., ed. P. Van den Ven, SubsHag 32, no. 2 (Brussels, 1970), 253–314. For comments on the mother-child relationship here, see A. Kazhdan, “Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 132.

12 BHG 65, in *Les saints stylites*, ed. H. Delehay, SubsHag 14 (Brussels–Paris, 1923), 148–69. Of further interest is the *Vita of Alypios* (BHG 66d) by Anthony, Monk and Presbyter of St. Sophia, in *Inédits byzantins d'Ochrida, Candie et Moscou*, ed. F. Halkin, SubsHag 38 (Brussels, 1963), 167–208.

13 BHG 2422, in PG 99:883a–902c.

14 In *The Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful Written By His Grandson Niketas*, ed. and trans. L. Rydén, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 8 (Uppsala, 2002).

15 In *Autobiografia: Encomio per la madre*, ed. and trans. U. Criscuolo (Naples, 1989). For a translation into English, see A. Kaldellis, ed. and trans., *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), 51–109.

Komnene and grandmother Anna Dalassene (twelfth century)¹⁶

9. Manuel II Palaiologos's *Dialogue with His Mother Helena about Marriage* (fourteenth century)¹⁷

Both Theodore of Stoudios and Manuel Palaiologos also wrote letters to their mothers, and many more minor items of this sort might be added to the texts just named.¹⁸ Moreover, a variety of direct and indirect allusions to mothers are invoked across a wide range of sources—from letters and poetry to homilies and hagiography—suggesting that the theme of ordinary motherhood was forever present in the shadows of Byzantine literature, even though it only infrequently entered the limelight to the extent it does in the above texts.¹⁹

16 Anna Komnene, *The Alexiad*, in *Alexiade*, 4 vols., ed. and trans. B. Leib with P. Gautier (Paris, 1937–76). Eng. trans. E. R. A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene* (Baltimore–Harmondsworth, 1969).

17 In *Dialogue with the Empress Mother on Marriage*, ed. and trans. A. Angelou (Vienna, 1989).

18 Theodore of Stoudios, *Letter 6*, in *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 2 vols., ed. G. Fatouros, CFHB 31 (Berlin–New York, 1992), 21–23; Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letter 1*, in *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, ed. and trans. G. T. Dennis, CFHB 8, DOT 4 (Washington, DC, 1977), 2–4.

19 The examples of minor pieces, too many to list here, include such tenth-century letters as that of Philetos Synadenos and Theodore of Nicaea, published in *Epistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle*, ed. J. Darrouzès (Paris, 1960), 249–50, 276–77 respectively; within hagiography, see the *Vita of Thomaïs of Lesbos* (BHG 2454) cited in n. 1 above, the *Vita of John Kalybites* (BHG 868), in “Ο ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Καλυβίτης (Ἀνέκδοτα Κείμενα ἐκ Παρισινῶν Κωδίκων),” ed. O. Lampsides, *Platon* 16 (1964): 262–72 (later published in *Archeion Pontou* 28 [1966]: 5–13), esp. 263.26–266.31 and 268.10–272.17, and the *Vita of Stephen the Younger* (BHG 1666), in *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, ed. and trans. M.-F. Auzépy, *Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs* 3 (Aldershot, 1997), 92.1–97.15, trans. 183–89, 107.5–19, trans. 200, and 148.12–20, trans. 246–47; among *typika*, see *The Typikon of Empress Irene Doukaina Komnene*, in “Le Typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè,” ed. P. Gautier, *REB* 43 (1985): 123.1821–125.1877, trans. R. Jordan, in *BMTD*, 2:701–2; among epistolographers, see Theodore of Stoudios, *Letters* 509, 755–57; among poets, see Christopher of Mytilene, *Poem 57*, in *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios*, ed. E. Kurtz (Leipzig, 1903), 34–35. A number of portraits of wives also reveal something about the realities and expectations of motherhood, even if the woman's role as spouse is more developed than that of mother. These include the *Vita of Philaretos the Merciful* (BHG 1512), esp. 62.16–17, trans. 63; 68.146–76, trans. 69, 72.195–98, trans. 73; 74.245–47, trans. 75; 76.258–83, trans. 77; 76.288–80.329, trans. 77–81; 80.337–82.351, trans. 81–83; 82.366–75,

Apart from being few in number, the nine texts (or sets of texts) above are remarkable for their direct and imaginative treatments of motherhood. Four of the nine are dedicated to mothers exclusively (2, 3, 5, 7), whereas the other five either give them equal billing with their husbands, children, and parents or cast them in a prominent subordinate role (1, 4, 6, 8–9).²⁰ A pronounced panegyric spirit governs all the accounts, even the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene and the *Dialogue* of Manuel Palaiologos. Family relations deliver the panegyric in six out of the nine cases (1, 5–9), a close family friend acts as author in one instance (2), and anonymous writers are responsible for the other two (3–4). Interestingly, three of the nine authors were among the best rhetoricians that the Byzantine centuries ever produced (1, 2, 7), while another three were highly regarded as prose authors long after their deaths (5, 8–9). Whoever the author and whatever the genre of the piece, however, all the texts are united in the common purpose of exhibiting at length the exceptional virtues of their subject and illustrating those virtues through a series of vivid anecdotes. The product of this exercise is a number of glowing portraits of ordinary motherhood. Other models of virtue undeniably play a role in the construction of these portraits too, including a consideration of a mother's lineage and her success in imitating great idealized female archetypes like that of the Virgin. More interesting, however, is the extent to which the authors of these pieces take the unusual step of celebrating ordinary motherhood for its own sake rather than ignoring, denigrating, or subverting it for the purposes of recommending another ideal. Even

trans. 83; 84.402–15, trans. 85; 86.433–39, trans. 87; 88.461–62, trans. 89; 116.904–13, trans. 117, and Ptochoprodromos, *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, Kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar*, ed. and trans. H. Eideneier (Cologne, 1991), 99–107, trans. 177–85. Both the *Vita of Philaretos* and the *Ptochoprodromos* use paradox, satire, and exaggeration to characterize the wives and mothers under consideration. For Prodromos in particular, see M. Alexiou, “Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 92–102. For a classic invective attached to motherhood, the accusation of abortion or infanticide, see Procopius, *Secret History*, in *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*, 3 vols., ed. J. Haury and G. Wirth (Leipzig, 1962–64), 3:66.12.

20 For another example of female biography embedded within works about men, namely in the hagiographical collection MS Gothenburg, cod. gr. 4, see C. Rapp, “Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and Their Audience,” *DOP* 50 (1996): 319.

when the mother in question was equally renowned for other attributes and roles that she adopted in life—such as being a famous empress, a great benefactress, or a saintly nun—her primary identification as a maternal figure is retained. Not only do her maternal instincts live on in these texts, but much of the good she did in life remains rooted in her continued embodiment of ordinary motherhood.

One cannot fully discount the possibility that an author's sentimental attachment to the idea of motherhood in general, or indeed a specific mother-figure in particular, provided some inspiration for these laudatory compositions. Yet given what we know about the highly rhetorical nature of Byzantine literature—i.e., its inherently persuasive tendencies—it is likely that other, more public motives also came into play.²¹ If the target audience for these mother-accounts was women themselves, then it seems reasonable to suppose that these texts were designed to serve as models for education and imitation, as family memorials, or perhaps even as some type of domestic literature that circulated among literate women from one household to the next. On the other hand, if men and the public at large were the principal audience for these works, both the intentions underpinning them and their function itself must have changed. Kate Cooper's comments about the presuppositions underlying the literature on women from the first through fourth centuries add an important perspective here: "If we assume for the sake of argument that wherever a woman is mentioned a man's character is being judged—and along with it what he stands for—we can begin to see the rhetorical possibilities afforded by a female point of identification in a literature aimed at defending, or undermining, such sanctified Greco-Roman institutions as marriage, the family and even the city itself."²² This approach to reading the literature on late antique women provides a useful point of reference for the analysis that follows. Claudia Rapp's work on the audience and authorial motivations for

such literature is also essential background reading, notably her convincing claim that authors of religious texts about women do not typically choose women as subjects with an interest in the subject's gender per se, but rather because "they have a personal stake in the subject." Although this "personal stake" varied in kind and degree from one author to another, it was nonetheless the single most important factor behind the genesis of a piece of literature with a female protagonist. Furthermore, such a stake in the subject matter encouraged a retelling of events through an insider's frame of reference over an honest and straightforward biographical portrait.²³

Like earlier authors concerned with women, Byzantine authors with an interest in ordinary motherhood seem not to have taken their cue exclusively from the feelings of attachment to their subject. Rather, they could be expected to exploit the subject to a degree, much as rhetors had done for centuries,²⁴ with a view toward their own personal circumstances and perhaps even personal gain. Thus, the subject of motherhood, replete with topoi about piety, education, familial loyalty, security, and much else, was full of narrative possibilities.²⁵

In what follows, I assume that Byzantine authors on motherhood were writing primarily for an audience of their peers—be it male, female, or mixed. My claim is that they wrote about ordinary mothers with the express intention of saying as much about their children as they did about the mother herself. Most of the time, Byzantine mother-narratives function as windows through which to better see particular virtues of the mother's offspring, whereas less frequently they have dynastic purposes in mind. Either way, the subject matter of an ordinary mother was convenient

21 Among the many fine contributions to this subject, see Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures 53 (Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, 1991); G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London, 1980) esp. 120–72; idem, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1983).

22 K. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA-London, 1996), 19.

23 Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity" (n. 20 above), 322–29, esp. (for the quotation) 329. A similar point is made about Arabic sources on women by N. M. El-Cheikh, "Describing the Other to Get at the Self: Byzantine Women in Arabic Sources (8th–11th Centuries)," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 2 (1997): 242–43.

24 Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic* (n. 8 above), 13–15.

25 Kazhdan, "Women At Home" (n. 1 above), 10–13. For the correlation between motherhood and the themes of hope, safety, and security in late antique imperial coinage, see Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother" (n. 2 above), 166. For maternal motifs in Syriac literature on the relationship between mothers and daughters, see S. A. Harvey, "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography," *JECrSt* 4 (1996): 27–56, esp. 48–55.

for addressing larger themes of personal interest to the author. Indeed, when the author was himself or herself the adult child of the mother in question—as is the case with five of the nine authors under consideration—the work took on the character of an autobiography.²⁶ To this extent, this study contributes insights into the ongoing scholarly discussion concerning the nature of self-revelation in Byzantine literature, or what some call Byzantine autobiographical texts.²⁷

Before analyzing these texts, it is worth considering one last preliminary issue: whether the term *self-revelation* sufficiently describes the kind of self-expression we find in these texts. Comparable studies from other disciplines concerned with the premodern world suggest that perhaps it is not, especially when dealing (as I am) with rhetorical texts in general and a significant number of epideictic discourses in particular. In Cicero's case, for example, it has been found that both his epideictic discourses and other parts of his corpus were not so much a vehicle for self-revelation as they were the instruments of a "far-reaching self-fashioning project" that included "self-invention," "forging a new identity," and constructing a "textual self."²⁸ Likewise, for authors of the Second Sophistic, self-revelation in texts and speech was less an expression of their private thoughts and feelings than it was a deliberate performance of the self, or "writing the self," the aim of which was to construct a "publicly oriented persona" capable of defending and promoting an author's existing social status.²⁹ Not all such premodern texts play by the same self-serving rules, however. Recent work on a large and diverse number of autobiographical texts from the medieval Arabic world suggests that the incidents of self-revelation in rhetorical texts tell a

much more complicated story about their authors. In these texts, self-revelation may reflect a constructed, performed, or even invented self, yet within this apparently public performance of the self there was also at work a process of private "self-interpretation" and a desire for self-revelation.³⁰ Determining whether Byzantine autobiographical texts conform better to this last definition of self-revelation than to the patterns of the late Republic and early Empire will require further study. The present contribution is much more limited in scope. Its aim is to detect incidents of personal allusion and self-revelation within mother-narratives and to demonstrate how fruitful this type of literature was for defining, refining, and redefining the persona of the subject's children.

Mothers and Sons in Encomia and Funeral Orations

Michael Psellos's *Encomium to His Mother* is a particularly good place to begin exploring this interpretative angle, given its author's reputation for producing other works with rich and complex layers of meaning. Alexander Kazhdan and Jakov Ljubarskij have both recognized this tendency in Psellos, the former noting the deceptive theatrics he puts on display in his *Life of Auxentios*, and the latter following the subtle game of hide-and-seek, masking and unmasking, that runs between the lines of his letters. Both scholars conclude that autobiography and critical social commentary are central preoccupations of these works, even if Psellos takes pains to dress up his own concerns in the costumes of others.³¹ In a recent excellent reading of

26 Michael Angold has called this approach "incidental autobiography" and dated it to the 6th–10th centuries. It is to be contrasted with "deliberate autobiography," which is typical of the later Byzantine centuries. See, e.g., M. Angold, "The Autobiographical Impulse in Byzantium," *DOP* 52 (1998): 225–57, esp. 227–28, 252–53 and idem, "Autobiography and Identity: The Case of the Later Byzantine Empire," *BSI* 50, no. 1 (1999): 36–59, esp. 47.

27 For a review of the literature, see M. Hinterberger, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz*, *WByzSt* 22 (Vienna, 1999), 31–43.

28 J. Dugan, *Making a New Man: Ciceronian Self-Fashioning in the Rhetorical Works* (Oxford, 2005), 2, 4, 11. For the great potential inherent to epideictic discourse for such an agenda, see *ibid.*, 18–31.

29 Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic* (n. 8 above), 25–26 and 32–38 (on self performance), 75–79 (for the relationship between epideictic discourse and biography), 79–81, 83.

30 D. F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2001), 71–102 (for the complexities of autobiographical literature and its treatment in modern historiography generally), 241–42 (on the generic diversity in autobiographic literature and for the idea of interpreting the self), 247–49 (for the function of the autobiographic work as an invitation to visit the author's other literary work). See also Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, 32: "the two [i.e., private feelings and public performance of the self] may or may not coincide."

31 A. Kazhdan, "Hagiographical Notes (nos. 1–4)," *Byzantion* 53 (1983): 538–55; J. N. Ljubarskij, *Michail Psell: Lichnost' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1978), esp. 36–39. See also E. A. Fisher, "Michael Psellos on the Rhetoric of Hagiography and the *Life of Auxentius*," *BMGS* 17 (1993): 45–53 and Angold, "Autobiographical Impulse" (n. 26 above), 234–36. On this text see also the studies of A. Sideras, *Die byzantinischen Grabreden: Prosopographie, Datierung, Überlieferung*,

Psellos's *Encomium to his Mother*, Jeffrey Walker rightly sees a similar drama unfold, with the difference that the intimate subject matter of this work seems to provoke even further than usual the author's instincts for subtexts and layered meanings.³² Walker is uninterested in what the work says about ideas of Byzantine motherhood, so he does not ask whether Psellos thought it important to reflect on this matter. The basic aim of the work, in Walker's view, was instead to let Psellos's audience know of his deep commitment to secular studies and the rhetorical arts, a passion that began in his youth under the tutelage of his mother Theodote and continued unabated, notwithstanding the opposition of his mother in her later years and the disdain of others. For Walker, then, Psellos may have loved Theodote and felt himself in her debt, but in this work he uses her story as a device for making some rather bold declarations about himself and suggesting that those who think differently—like his mother in her later years—have lost their way. Such a statement was too controversial to be made in public, so Psellos couched it in highly sophisticated and obscure language, whose message would have been appreciated only by a select few of like mind.³³

Although this is an excellent way to read the *Encomium*, it fails to appreciate Psellos's deft handling of the theme of motherhood, and thereby misses an important point of his emphasis and craft. A close reading of the work suggests that Psellos knew very well that he needed to make a range of laudatory points about his mother before drawing close attention to a shorter list. If he did not structure his discourse thus, then his many claims to telling the simple truth about his mother—the central device here—would not have held weight. The obligatory points included her piety;³⁴

her humility, simplicity, and good judgment in deciding when to speak and when not to;³⁵ her concern for the poor and for holy men;³⁶ her ability to weave and look after the house;³⁷ the heartiness, cheerfulness, and hope she demonstrated during childbirth;³⁸ her ability to exert a positive influence on other family members;³⁹ and finally, the interest she showed in her children's education. These qualities represent a fair share of the qualities that all mothers in the Byzantine centuries were considered to possess (as we will see more clearly below), and by mentioning them all, Psellos acknowledges the danger of neglecting well-known standards. Finally, though, he draws attention to one theme in particular: the role of Theodote in his education. As he describes it, the process started very early on, when she banished nurses from his bedside, "took control of all my senses," and fed him on a diet of pious words and sober stories.⁴⁰ Theodote sent her son to school already by the time he reached age five. Then, when he reached age eight, she received a heavenly vision from such illustrious figures as John Chrysostom and Saints Peter and Paul that encouraged her to push him toward ever more advanced subjects.⁴¹ Later, she was his after-school drill instructor, sometimes spending the night in his bed to work through lessons.⁴² Even when Psellos was an adult and Theodote's interests had long since moved toward serious spiritual matters, she continued to act as his most reliable tutor (διδάσκαλος), though this time at his request and solely on religious themes.⁴³ She was even at hand for Psellos after her death, this time coming to him in a vision to introduce him to the master teacher of monks, St. Basil.⁴⁴

142 *Epitaphien und Monodien aus dem byzantinischen Jahrtausend*, WByzSt 19 (Vienna, 1994), 51–55 and Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 41–43.

32 For the autobiographical revelations within this and other of Psellos's encomiastic works, see also Hinterberger, *Autobiographische*, 152–53.

33 J. Walker, "These Things I Have Not Betrayed: Michael Psellos's *Encomium of His Mother* as a Defense of Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 22, no. 1 (2004): 49–102, esp. 62–64 for his excellent discussion of the rhetoric of "obscurity." Only at pp. 78–79 does Walker wonder whether Psellos's account is indeed biographical.

34 Michael Psellos, *Encomium for Theodote* (n. 15 above), 90.142–91.161, Ital. trans. 162 and Eng. trans. 55–56; 90.203–212, Ital. trans. 164 and Eng. 57; 99.409–424, Eng. trans. 171–72 and Ital. trans. 63–64; 107.638–108.677, Ital. trans. 179–80 and Eng. trans. 70–71.

35 Ibid., 98.392–99.408, Ital. trans. 170–71 and Eng. trans. 63.

36 Ibid., 108.678–109.707, Ital. trans. 181 and Eng. trans. 71–72.

37 Ibid., 89.129–90.133, Ital. trans. 161 and Eng. trans. 55; 190.213–191.229, trans. 164–65.

38 Ibid., 93.230–194.258, Ital. trans. 165–66 and Eng. trans. 58–59.

39 Ibid., 102.486–103.526, Ital. trans. 174–75 and Eng. trans. 66–67.

40 Ibid., 94.276.95–283, Ital. trans. 166–67 and Eng. trans. 59–60.

41 Ibid., 95.293–96.339, Ital. trans. 168 and Eng. trans. 60.

42 Ibid., 105.572–106.601, Ital. trans. 176–78 and Eng. trans. 68–69.

43 Ibid., 125.1142–128.1246, Ital. trans. 196–99 and Eng. trans. 84–86.

44 Ibid., 142.1629–144.1684, Ital. trans. 212–13 and Eng. trans. 97–99.

In drawing attention to the importance of his mother as educator, Psellos was not merely being self-referential,⁴⁵ he was being shrewdly self-referential by embedding his story into a long tradition in which mothers were cast in this role of tutelage. The tradition is well attested among the upper classes of Rome,⁴⁶ it is acknowledged in Scripture,⁴⁷ it finds expression in stories about the Virgin Mary's formative years,⁴⁸ and it is documented in dozens of sources about ordinary mothers from the late antique, early Christian, and Byzantine centuries.⁴⁹ No one in this tradition was quite as extraordinary as Psellos's mother, who proved competent in advanced secular studies and trained her son from his birth to her death, but of course that was precisely the point. His audience must have taken sheer delight in having never seen a literary mother quite like this one before.

Theodore of Stoudios's *Encomium to His Mother* moves in a similar direction to that of Psellos's for some distance, but then decidedly changes course to locate its heroine, Theoktiste, in a different context. Like Psellos's mother, Theoktiste was her children's first teacher and a regular presence in her son's life until her death.⁵⁰ She was also humble and pious, knew how to run her household, pitied the poor, was kind to holy men, and

was ready to give counsel to family members.⁵¹ Where Theoktiste distinguished herself from both Psellos's mother and others was in her uncompromising piety and her sense of mission in influencing and shaping the lives of those closest to her. According to Theodore, as a young mother she already demonstrated an unusually strong commitment to correct faith by rejecting the advice of older women who advised her to place a host of religious amulets in and around the crib of her newly born children.⁵² Before long, not only was Theoktiste ready to defend her views against opposition, she also insisted on using her influence as wife and mother to bring others into conformity with her religious calling. To this end, she abstained from sexual relations with her husband for five years, subjected her children to rather spartan standards of daily existence, alternated between indulging her slaves and fiercely beating them to teach virtue, and finally persuaded her whole household—some against their will—to retire to the monastic life.⁵³ A bossy streak ran through her. When her adolescent son begged her not to abandon him for the convent, she threatened to drag him forcibly to the boat that was waiting to take him away.⁵⁴ Later on, when she became an abbess, she was equally determined to herd her fellow sisters toward the kind of piety and discipline she embodied, even if it meant punishing and beating them when they stepped out of line.⁵⁵ It was precisely this characteristic that also prompted her to step forth and stiffen Theodore's resolve from time to time.⁵⁶

At a certain point during the *Encomium* Theodore remarks that he wants to avoid turning this speech into an encomium of himself.⁵⁷ With these words he carefully avoids the trap of talking too openly about himself (περιαυτολογία) without reason, a practice that the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition had looked down upon for centuries.⁵⁸ At the surface level of Theodore's

45 Criscuolo, *Autobiografia* (n. 15 above), 29–38, esp. 37–38; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 345–48; Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons* (n. 15 above), 30 and 33–34.

46 S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London–Sydney, 1988), 170–73; B. Rawson, “The Roman Family,” in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (London–Sydney, 1986), 30, 40–41; eadem, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford, 2003), 157–58.

47 P. Balla, *The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and its Environment* (Tübingen, 2003), 82–84.

48 Epiphanius the Monk, *Vita of Mary, Mother of Jesus* (BHG 1049), in PG 120:192b–c and 192c–193b.

49 G. S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London–New York, 2000), 150–54. For other examples, see Libanius, *Autobiography and Selected Letters*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge, MA–London, 1992), letter 1, 56–57; *Vita of Gregory of Dekapolis* (BHG 711) 1, in *Ignatios Diakonos und die Vita des Hl. Gregorios Dekapolites*, ed. and trans. G. Makris (Stuttgart, 1997), 60.1–62.9, trans. 61–63; Methodios, *Vita of Theophanes Confessor of Megas Agros* (BHG 17872), in “Methodii patriarchi Constantinopolitae Vita Sancti Theophani,” ed. B. Latyshev, *MASP*, VIII^e ser. 13, no. 4 (1918): 4.5–9.

50 *Vita of Theoktiste* (BHG 2422) 4, PG 99:888a–c (education) and 897c–d (later visits to Theodore).

51 Ibid. 3–6, PG99:885b–d, 888b, 889a–b.

52 Ibid. 2, 884b–885b.

53 Ibid. 4–6, PG99:885d–892a.

54 Ibid. 7, PG99:892a–d.

55 Ibid. 11–12, PG99:897a–900a (her virtues) and 900a–b (her deeds as abbess).

56 Ibid. 9, PG99:896b.

57 Ibid. 9, PG99:893c.

58 Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 132–49. See, similarly, Psellos, *Encomium for Theodote* (n. 15 above), 94.259–64, Ital. trans. 166 and Eng. trans. 60.

text he most certainly remains true to his word. Yet one wonders whether everything below that level—the fine print—does not convey a complicated drama whose central character is an earnest and somewhat hard-nosed monastic leader living in slippery times, not unlike Theodore himself.⁵⁹ Theodore's immediate audience was a male monastic one, which led him to apologize for introducing material that may have seemed extraneous to their interests.⁶⁰ This rhetorical situation and his sensitivity to it gives credence to the suggestion that he wanted to focus this speech on a single relevant theme and tailor it to his audience's needs.⁶¹ Also of interest is Theodore's frequent self-referential use of maternal images in his other writings. In a letter to one of his monks, for example, he compares himself to a mother nursing and feeding his child.⁶² In another, he reacts to news from a monk by saying that he feels like a mother listening to the voices of her children.⁶³ None of this absolutely proves that the *Encomium* must be read either as an autobiography, a monastic parable, or both. To exclude these possibilities, however, is to ignore a rather curious convergence of signs and signifiers he was presenting: first, his deep appreciation for how Theoktiste mothered her children and ran her household; second, his confidence that these qualities served her well later as a monastic leader; and third, his own occasional self-identification with motherhood. Whether simple monks in his audience managed to connect the dots, and thereby take something more from the encomium than mere admiration for their

abbot's extraordinary mother, is uncertain. Those in the know, on the other hand, probably came away much impressed with the extraordinary role model Theodore had found in his mother.⁶⁴

Whatever the different reactions to Theodore's *Encomium*, no Byzantine audience expected to hear plain truths spoken at a funeral oration or other such memorial. Theodore knew this, and so did Psellos. So it comes as no surprise that both men anticipate criticism by repeatedly insisting that their words are really quite accurate and objective.⁶⁵ The author of yet another funeral oration, Chorikios of Gaza, inserts no such claims of innocence into his *Encomium of Mary, Mother of the Bishops Marcianus and Anastasios*. But he does summarize the normal expectations of an encomium, and explains that he will do something different on this occasion. He says: "Many of those [speakers] who are accustomed to undertake such sad themes sing their words and suppose that they delight listeners with their lamentations, and that the tears they produce become the applause of a mournful spectacle."⁶⁶ Hence, Chorikios makes no promise to dampen the drama in his oration. Yet unlike the rhetorical antics of others, he intends to speak exclusively about the significant aspects of Mary's life, which for him were her maternal virtues. These include, as can be expected, humility, prudent household management, a tendency toward silence, and so forth.⁶⁷ In addition, and more interestingly, he offers Mary's children as proof of her virtue. He explains that some encomia focus on the greatness of lineage to demonstrate the virtue of offspring, but his intention is to show how the virtue of the offspring makes the reputation of the parents and lineage.⁶⁸ Accordingly, much of the rest of his encomium is dedicated to praising Mary through her eight

59 For Theodore's habit of including explicit autobiographical information in his encomia/funeral orations, see S. Efthymiadis, "The Byzantine Hagiographer and His Audience in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Metaphrasis: Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. C. Högel (Oslo, 1996), 70; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische*, 152. For a recent, fine reading of the oration, with a similar attention to Theodore's rhetorical agenda, see S. Efthymiadis and J. M. Featherstone, "Establishing a Holy Lineage: Theodore the Stoudite's Funerary Catechism for His Mother (BHG 2422)," in *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Grünbart (Berlin–New York, 2007), 13–25.

60 *V. of Theoktiste* (BHG 2422) 1 and 6, PG 99:884a, 892a

61 Ibid. 1, PG99:894b: "This description (ἀπαγγελία) about her is not something contrary to a homily and will not prove itself unprofitable to you, I think, but on the contrary it will be of some use" (my translation).

62 Theodore of Stoudios, *Letter* 180, 302.1–303.4.

63 Ibid., *Letter* 374, 505.2–3.

64 Efthymiades and Featherstone, "Holy Lineage," 23, make an analogous point when they discuss the "close link between female biography and male autobiography," which in their reading of Theodore and other Byzantine authors amounts to "autohagiography."

65 *V. of Theoktiste* (BHG 2422) 1 and 9, PG 99:884b, 893c; Psellos, *Encomium for Theodote* 1 and 5–6, 86.17–87.22, trans. 157; 94.259–62, trans. 166; 97.339–53, trans. 168–69. One might even want to read their petitions of innocence paradoxically, as a topos that invites the audience to pay close attention to nuances.

66 Chorikios of Gaza, *Oration to Mary*, 99.11–14.

67 Ibid., 100.16–101.8, 104.17–105.8.

68 Ibid., 101.9–6, 101.21.

children, notably the two who are bishops. This turn of events is interesting because it clearly shows that Chorikios's *Encomium* was written in praise as much of the children as of the mother. It has a lot of subject matter in common with the encomia of Theodore and Psellos, but it drops the pretense of being an objective, accurate account. The other interesting point is that Chorikios, like Theodore and Psellos, was fond of conflating the virtues of mother and child. The one he identified in Mary and expounded upon most was philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία), a quality she exercised for years toward her adult children,⁶⁹ and later employed in the one dramatic, public achievement of her lifetime: the ailing emperor Justin I had a dream-vision in which she came to him and cured him of a nasty inflammation of the groin.⁷⁰ Byzantine concepts of φιλανθρωπία are complex, as we all know, but properly speaking they belong less to the world of housewives than to the world of powerful men like her own two bishop sons. The fact that Mary's sons hold the office of bishop at all means that φιλανθρωπία is expected of them. The oration shows in turn how, by birth and maternal example, such a virtue is proper to them. In sum, once again an oration about a mother seems to end up indirectly highlighting the particular character and achievements of the children.

Gregory of Nazianzus's two accounts of his mother Nonna—the one his *Funeral Oration for His Father Gregory*, the other his *Funeral Oration for His Sister Gorgonia*—follow similar patterns to that of the oration just examined. After reviewing her virtues, the basic message he settled on was that the Church found in his mother not only a great champion against paganism and heresy, but also a timely support for the priesthood.⁷¹ Space does not permit a deeper discussion of these

texts and their various self-referential subtexts.⁷² Yet it is worth lingering on one seemingly tangential but still important point, namely, what Gregory's selective recollection of a near-death experience at sea tells us about his manipulation of his mother's memory.

The episode is described in Gregory's *Funeral Oration for His Father Gregory* and in two of his poems. In one account, his mother Nonna learns of her son's peril at sea through a divine vision, and then (again in a vision) miraculously appears at the scene of the impending tragedy and personally saves Gregory's ship from danger.⁷³ By contrast, his later (and more expressly autobiographical) poems about the same incident give Nonna no credit at all, attributing the rescue instead to the mere grace of God, together with a group of sailors who happened upon the scene.⁷⁴ The discrepancy between the two accounts is so sharp that one wonders how Gregory could have published these two very different versions. To complicate matters further, his drama at sea also concludes differently in the two accounts, the oration suggesting that he experienced an inner conversion without his mother's prompting, and the poems explicitly pointing to his immediate baptism with the help of Nonna's prayers. The exact connection between his mother, this near-death experience, and his subsequent baptism must remain obscure. Most obscure of all, however, is the character of Nonna herself as she drifts in and out of the historical record. Gregory may well have admired her accomplishments, but his handling of her on paper is simply too contradictory not to be suspicious. Here, even more clearly than with the later compositions of Psellos, Theodore of

69 Ibid., 104.17–105.8, esp. 105.2–3.

70 Ibid., 105.8–106.10, esp. (for φιλανθρωπία) 105.18.

71 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Funeral Oration for Gorgonia*, 252.1–254.2, trans. 253–55 (positive Christian influence of Nonna on her husband Gregory, and birth of Gregory of Nazianzus); 254.1–256.2, trans. 255–57 (positive influence of Nonna on her husband's role as bishop); 251.1–11, 268.18, trans. 259–67 (catalogue of Nonna's virtues as woman, wife, mother); 268.18–12, 272.25, trans. 269–73 (service to priests, bishops, and the church); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration for Gregory*, PG 35:992d–993a (Nonna steers husband clear of dubious dogmas); 993b–996a and 1000a–c (Nonna is her husband's teacher in religious matters); 996c–997c (Nonna's excellence as woman, wife, mother); 1009a–c (Nonna acts as husband's close aide during his episcopate).

72 For Gregory's habit of including explicit autobiographical information in his encomia/funeral orations, see Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 152. For links between female biography and male autobiography in Gregory's treatment of Gorgonia, see V. Burrus, "Life After Death: The Martyrdom of Gorgonia," in J. Børtnes and T. Hägg, eds., *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections* (Copenhagen, 2006), 156–57. For a close reading of Gregory's familial orations, T. Hägg, "Playing with Expectations: Gregory's Funeral Orations," in *ibid.*, 140–51. For a broader exploration of autobiographical references in Gregory's oeuvre, see J. A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY, 2001).

73 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration for Gregory*, PG 35:1024b–1025a.

74 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Autobiographical Poems*, ed. and trans. C. White (Cambridge, 1996), 16.101–24.210, trans. 17–25, and *idem*, *Poems*, in PG37:993.308–994.324. On Gregory's autobiographical poems, see Hinterberger, *Autobiographische*, 68–69.

Stoudios, and Chorikios, we see motherhood as a topic with layers of meanings, some of which reflect back upon the rhetorical agenda of the authors themselves.

Mothers and Children in Hagiography and Biography

A number of Byzantine hagiographies of later centuries, especially the *Vita of Alypios*, the *Vita of Martha*, and the *Vita of Philaretos the Merciful* betray the same tendency. A pattern common to all these works, in their various redactions, is the seemingly retractable image of the mother — critical to the action and character development of the hero in one rendering, while transformed if not made invisible in another. In a similar fashion to Gregory's portrayal of his mother Nonna, authors and their redactors press the image and actions of mothers into service only if the occasion warrants, namely, when they want to illustrate, explain, or reinforce a particular image of their biographical subject. Jan Olof Rosenqvist has observed this in his examination of Philaretos's wife, Theosebo, whose image underwent several modifications over the course of later redactions of her husband's *Vita*, all in the name of style and audience considerations by his reckoning.⁷⁵ Theosebo is not the most outstanding example of motherhood we have in Byzantine hagiography; indeed, her main role is that of a wife.⁷⁶ Yet her case typifies the prevailing patterns found in the two other hagiographies. The earliest redaction of the *Vita of Alypios* gives a sparing account of Alypios's anonymous mother, for example, whereas the later one richly details her character, actions, and influence on her son.⁷⁷ A similar pattern is detected in

the treatment of Symeon Stylites' mother Martha, who is hardly featured in the earlier *Vita of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, but is emphasized in the later and kindred *Vita of Martha*.⁷⁸

Why the characterization of these two mothers intensifies over time, from one account to the next, is far too complex to discuss in full here. Part of the explanation may rest upon a better understanding of the actual historical cults of Alypios's mother and Martha: i.e., perhaps changes in the hagiography were a response either to their increased veneration among the faithful, or to intensified interest in family cults in general. But these interesting considerations not only take us far beyond the scope of this paper but require more attention than modern scholarship has yet given them.⁷⁹ For now, note how mother-accounts function within the hagiographic discourse itself, especially toward the hero and his actions. If hagiographies were revised to better explain and illustrate the wonders of Alypios and

of the recensions, see E. Schiffer, "Metaphrastic Lives and Earlier *Metaphrasis* of Saints' Lives," in *Metaphrasis* (n. 64 above), 24–28.

78 Compare the sixth- or early seventh-century *Vita of Symeon Stylites the Younger* (BHG 1689) (n. 11 above), in *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune* (521–592), 2 vols., ed. and trans. P. Van den Ven, SubsHag 32 (Brussels, 1962), 1:3.9–25, trans. 2:5–6 (Martha is pure as a girl and reluctant bride), 1:3.1–6.38, trans. 2:6–9 (birth and infancy of Symeon), 1:9.1–9, trans. 2:12–13 (dream about Symeon's future), 1:79.26–41, trans. 2:100 (Martha present at one of Symeon's cures), 1:84.16–25, trans. 2:106–7 (Symeon predicts earthquake before Martha), 1:87.1–6, trans. 2:107; 1:113.13–15, trans. 2:137; 1:113.1–3, trans. 2:138; (Martha begs Symeon for prayers to mitigate various tragedies), 1:129.118–70, trans. 2:143 (Martha witnesses Symeon's miracle), with the seventh-ninth century *Vita of Martha* (BHG 1174), 254.22–257.25 (Martha's virtues as woman), 260.119 and 267.3–274.2 (visits and advice to her son), 259.1–19 and 261.1–264.16 et seq. (various divine visions of and about Martha), 271.1–313.26 (wonders of death and miracles after death). The editor of the above volumes remarks (1:87* and 2:100) upon the relatively low-key role played by Martha and other women in the *Vita of Symeon*. For a review of Martha's depiction in these texts, over and against that in existing religious imagery in existence, see Drewer, "Saints and Their Families" (n. 2 above), 264–67.

79 For Martha's *Vita*, see the editor Ven den Ven's notes (*Vita of Symeon the Younger*, 1:67*–92*, esp. 92*), where he ultimately calls it a "roman historique." For the strong correlation between certain hagiographic narratives and family narratives, see A.-M. Talbot, "Family Cults in Byzantium: The Case of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," in *Leimon: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 6 (Uppsala, 1996), 49–69. I hope to treat the issue of hagiography and local cults in an upcoming article, the initial findings of which were presented in 2006 at the 20th international congress of Byzantine studies in London.

75 J. O. Rosenqvist, "Changing Styles and Changing Mentalities: The Secondary Versions of the Life of St. Philaretos the Merciful," in *Metaphrasis* (n. 59 above), 53–57.

76 See the *Vita of Philaretos the Merciful* (BHG 1512) 1, 3–4, and 12 (n. 18 above), 1.16–17, trans. 2; 68.146–76, trans. 69; 72.195–98, trans. 73; 74.245–47, trans. 75; 76.258–80.329, trans. 77–81; 80.337–82.351, trans. 81–83; 82.366–75, trans. 83; 84.402–10, trans. 85; 84.414–15, trans. 85–87; 86.443–39, trans. 87; 88.461–2, trans. 89; 116.904–13, trans. 117.

77 Compare the pre-metaphrastic *Vita of Alypios* (BHG 66d) 176.1–178.4 (mother ushers Alypios through childhood and then lets him be), with the metaphrastic *Vita of Alypios* (BHG 65) 151.5–152.3 (consults with Alypios about his vocation), 159.22–160.25 (advises and attends him under his column), 160.26–161.4 (prodigious almsgiving of), 162.33–163.19 (life as a female ascetic). For a discussion

Symeon, then these enhanced images of their mothers were appropos. Or, as Susan Ashbrook Harvey has said of the construction of mother-daughter accounts in Syriac hagiography: "Like all Christian literature, these texts must ultimately retell the salvation drama of the gospel message."⁸⁰ If, on the other hand, these hagiographic texts were generated in connection with the growth of the cults of Alypius and Symeon, then the new profile given to their mothers may have made them look more human and accessible, or perhaps just more convincing to later generations of the faithful.⁸¹ In either case, in the later "motherly" rewriting of these *vitae*, the reputation of the saints' mothers themselves were enhanced. Although such sweeping changes from one recension to another is normal in Byzantine hagiography, the suggestion here is simply that in these cases—consistent with the way other texts handle mothers—the utility and attraction of maternal images helped prompt the revision.

Two final chapters in the annals of maternal images—both from the imperial court—demonstrate just how useful a rhetorical tool motherhood had become for accommodating the new and more fluid social realities of middle and late Byzantium. In one—Anna Komnene's portraits of her grandmother Anna Dalassene and mother Irene Doukaina Komnene—maternal imagery is mobilized to argue for an aristocratic woman's right of access to both a full intellectual life and real political power, rights claimed by Anna herself, albeit normally reserved for men.⁸² In the other, Manuel II Palaiologos's characterization of his mother Helena, there is a subtle appeal to the idea that being a political leader and responsible citizen is ultimately less attractive than being a promising student of philosophy.

Scholars have long noted that Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* mixes personal narrative with history. Some have left the matter there,⁸³ and others have gone so far as

to claim that Anna's account amounts to a form of autobiography. For Martin Hinterberger, the *Alexiad* is "über weite Strecken eine beeindruckende Selbstdarstellung der Autorin."⁸⁴ In a more recent study Thalia Gouma-Peterson argues specifically for its autobiographic character. While granting that the *Alexiad* is not a diary as such, Gouma-Peterson proposes that Anna "is offering her own narrative within the context of an official version of reality." More specifically, Gouma-Peterson sees the *Alexiad* as a performance of gender, in which Anna endeavors to define herself as neither an "Eve" nor a "Mary" nor an ordinary wife and mother nor even the model daughter of a famous imperial couple. Rather, the self-definition she hoped to achieve in the *Alexiad*, according to Gouma-Peterson, was that of a woman who had transcended the constrictive expectations of her gender. Anna approached the challenge of self-definition in two ways: first, by making plain her qualifications as an intellectual figure on a par with any man, which thus entitled her to write her family's history; and second, by laying claim to a leadership role in imperial politics, notably the political power that was lost to her after her father Alexios's death.⁸⁵ Some of these authorial intentions come out more or less explicitly in the *Alexiad*, according to Gouma-Peterson, while others emerge indirectly from Anna's detailed characterization of her grandmother Anna Dalassene (as a courageous and assertive, almost manly, figure) and her mother Irene Doukaina Komnene (as an intellectual). Gouma-Peterson asks us to believe, in the end, that Anna so manipulates the images of these two maternal figures that she "forcefully establishes her maternal genealogy as a model and organizing image for her own social relation and authorial production."⁸⁶

It remains to be seen how many scholars will be persuaded by this boldly gendered and autobiographical reading of the *Alexiad*. One argument in her favor, which Gouma-Peterson fails to make, is that Anna's use

80 Harvey, "Sacred Bonding" (n. 25 above), 50.

81 On this issue generally, see Drewer, "Saints and Their Families," 270.

82 For the increased political power of aristocratic women beginning in the eleventh century, Laiou, "Role of Women" (n. 3 above), esp. 233, 249–51.

83 E.g., G. Buckler, *Anna Komnena: A Study* (London, 1929), esp. 245–50; C. Diehl, *Figures Byzantines*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1938), 2:48–52; H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1978), 1:403 and 406–8; Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (n. 3 above), 236–67.

84 Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 154 (quotation) and 301–2.

85 T. Gouma-Peterson, "Gender and Power: Passages to the Maternal in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," in *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, ed. T. Gouma-Peterson (New York–London, 2001), 107–24, esp. 111 for the quotation. For a similar, if less assertive point of view regarding the *Alexiad* as autobiography, see R. Macrides, "The Pen and the Sword: Who Wrote the *Alexiad*?" in *ibid.*, esp. 71–75; D. R. Reinsch, "Women's Literature in Byzantium?—The Case of Anna Komnene," in *ibid.*, 89–92.

86 *Ibid.*, 109 (rephrased on p. 120) for the quotation.

of the theme of motherhood reveals and defines herself in a manner consistent with the mother-son portraits of authors such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Chorikios of Gaza, Theodore of Stoudios, and Michael Psellos. The difference was that these men wrote not as narrators acutely aware of their gender, but rather as able narrators working within a specific rhetorical tradition. If Anna really wanted to prove that she was a Komnenian “son,” what better way to do so than by returning to the very same well of maternal imagery that these prominent male intellectual figures of the past had used to establish their “motherly” credentials? Her portrait of Anna Dalassene as an independent woman of power and courage is, in fact, inseparable from that of Anna Dalassene as a mother and grandmother. Anna Komnene characterizes her grandmother both as a model woman—overflowing with ideal female, uxorial, and maternal virtues—and as someone whose instinct for power was primarily a manifestation of motherly affection and duty.⁸⁷ This picture of Anna Dalassene may or may not have been blatant dynastic propaganda; regardless, it cleverly expresses through a recognizable mode of discourse Anna Komnene’s own longing for power. Her narrative about her grandmother’s disposition of maternal power within a family—and in this case an imperial family—more persuasively presents her own qualifications than would an overt declaration that she, like her grandmother, transcends her gender.⁸⁸ But there was also a technical problem with Anna’s attempt to link herself with her grandmother: although Anna Dalassene embodied the spirit of motherhood, she did not personally inculcate its values in Anna Komnene, who knew her grandmother only as a teenager.⁸⁹ Hence, unlike earlier Byzantine mother-child narratives, that of

Anna Dalassene in the *Alexiad* leaves it to the audience to judge how the granddaughter has acquired such motherly virtues. Anna Komnene never explicitly addresses this weakness in her discourse on motherhood. Yet one may suggest that for her and her audience the question of the grandmother’s significant influence would have been plausible, if not obvious, on the following grounds. First, maternal values and qualities simply ran in the family, be it through the direct transmission from mother to daughter or indirectly from grandmother to granddaughter. Second, even if Anna Komnene was not raised from early childhood by her grandmother, she did have significant contact with her as an adolescent and adult, and more generally (as the *Alexiad* shows) knew a great deal about the life of Anna Dalassene, enough indeed to have considered her a role model. Hence, it is not too much to suppose that Anna Dalassene’s maternal influence on her granddaughter, although not direct, could easily be accepted as demonstrable.

In her characterization of her own mother, Irene Doukaina, Anna Komnene is in a better position to claim direct maternal influence. Yet here she emphasizes the theme of motherhood differently in response to Irene’s dedication to a life of study as opposed to one of imperial politics. Not only was Irene Anna’s birth mother, but the two women shared a close bond throughout life and spent their last several years together at the monastery of Kecharitomene cultivating literary pursuits. Although sources indicate that this was an involuntary and unfortunate end for both of them,⁹⁰ Anna’s *Alexiad* presents the transition from the imperial court to a secluded life of study as a deliberate choice. The last significant piece of action in the *Alexiad*—prior to Anna’s epilogue—features Irene’s dramatic renunciation of the world, after nearly thirty years of serving as a faithful imperial wife and mother.⁹¹ Actually, a lot more was unfolding behind the scenes than Anna was willing to reveal in her *Alexiad*; this again raises the question

87 *Alexiad*, 1:125.8–127.15, trans. 120–22 and 1:119.13–120.15, trans. 115–16 respectively. See also the heavily weighted appeal to Anna Dalassene’s motherhood in the chrysobull of 1085 in *ibid.*, 1:120.26–122.31, trans. 115–18. On this general point, see Hill, “Imperial Women” (n. 3 above), 82–91, especially 83: “[Among imperial women of the 11th–12th centuries] . . . women acting as mothers were not considered to be betraying their femininity, while powerful wives were. By the eleventh century, the role of mother was the most powerful ideological role for women.”

88 *Alexiad*, 1:125.19–22, trans. 120: “not only was she a credit to her own sex, but to men as well.”

89 *Ibid.*, 1:129.26–29, trans. 124. Actually, Anna would have been much better acquainted with Maria of Alania, who was to be her mother-in-law and was one of her closest caretakers from early childhood, as 1:105.3–7, trans. 104–5 makes clear.

90 Though not elaborating on the details, the *Alexiad* itself (3:240.12–241.5, trans. 513–15) does not hide Anna’s bitterness about her monastic exile.

91 *Ibid.*, 1:129.26–29, trans. 124. I accept Gouma-Peterson’s reading of this episode (“Gender and Power” [n. 85 above], 118–19) as more than a mere act of mourning.

of dynastic propaganda.⁹² Be that as it may, this closing image of Irene, retiring to a life of study, is entirely consistent with Anna's detailed characterization of her mother developed in earlier chapters. As Anna tells it, her mother's virtues in adulthood included a reluctance to speak in public, her marked influence within the privacy of the family, her expertise in running the household, an interest in studies, her piety, her compassion, her reputation for charitable works, and so forth.⁹³ From among these well-known characteristics, however, Anna selects her mother's love of knowledge for special consideration, referring to this point on three separate occasions in the *Alexiad*. Tellingly, the most evocative of the three portraits—a digression about Irene's love of reading the Fathers, couched within an extended narrative about the state of philosophical studies in late eleventh-century Constantinople—is closely linked with Irene's maternal relationship to Anna. In point of fact, Irene is said to have been in the habit of reading challenging theological works at mealtimes, and then discussing them with her daughter. Irene is quoted as telling her daughter, "I myself do not approach such books without a tremble, yet I cannot tear myself away from them."⁹⁴ The inclusion of such an intimate moment between mother and daughter within the context of a general discussion about public affairs would appear slightly ridiculous at the hands of a less skilled author. Anna's apologies aside,⁹⁵ this and related passages show how careful, persistent, and bold she was in constructing an image of her mother as an intellectual, notably by de-emphasizing so many other of her qualities.⁹⁶

92 Namely, the struggle for the imperial throne between John II Komnenos and the joint forces of Irene and Anna, a struggle which John would win. On this episode, see Buckler, *Anna Komnena* (n. 83 above), 246–50.

93 *Alexiad*, 1:111.17–112.27, trans. 110–11; 3:59.23–60.21, trans. 374–78.

94 *Ibid.*, 1:112.7–17, trans. 110 (Irene is a new Athena), and 2:38.2–21, trans. 178–79 (Irene frequently reads theology at table; she speaks with her daughter about her love of knowledge; and Anna is deeply moved by this habit), 3:60.6–20, trans. 374 (Irene reads books of saints as one of her pursuits, and her comportment is comparable to the ancient female philosopher Theano). For the mother-daughter reading episode, see Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (n. 3 above), 255–56.

95 For Anna's apologies, prior to and ending the digression, see *Alexiad*, 2:28.4–5, trans. 178, and 2:28.21–24, trans. 179.

96 The other prominent quality that Anna emphasizes is Irene's dedication to her husband Alexios, as in *Alexiad*, 3:60.3–62.23, trans.

It must remain open whether the Irene we encounter in the *Alexiad* merely reflects Anna's deep and sometimes blind appreciation of her mother's intellectual interests and gifts, or whether her characterization should be read as a convenient narrative, constructed by the author to reveal and define her own character. Maybe both motives came into play. Knowing what we do about rhetorical uses of motherhood prior to Anna, however, the second option cannot be easily excluded. Furthermore, her willful coloring of Irene's biography, her personal involvement in some dramatic moments of her mother's intellectual life, and her pride in her mother's intellectual accomplishments show that the author had a very personal stake in shaping her mother's image, to emphasize her own profile as an intellectual.⁹⁷

A Son and Mother in Dialogue

Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos had a similar end in mind when he composed his *Dialogue with the Empress Mother Helena*, except that he made no pretense to write serious history. Instead, he placed his mother at the center of an elaborate and somewhat fanciful literary masquerade, expressly aiming to improve his already respectable reputation as an author.⁹⁸ Manuel communicated these sentiments to his old mentor Demetrios Kydones in a letter he dispatched along with a copy of the *Dialogue*. In the letter, Manuel contents himself with the thought that this work has surpassed everything in his thirty-year literary career.⁹⁹

Although he neglected to say why he was so proud of the work, it seems clear that his deft and original treatment of the theme of motherhood had something to do with it. Manuel adopts and develops in the *Dialogue* three relevant premises. First, he takes pains to insist that he is writing not about a detached or idealized imperial princess, but about an ordinary mother. She is made to look ordinary when Manuel endows her

374–77 and 3:220.28–241.5, trans. 507–13. Neither account—her decision to accompany Alexios on campaign and her nursing him during his fatal sickness—is without historical problems.

97 *Alexiad*, preface, 1:1.5 et seq.

98 Cf. M. Dąbrowska, "Ought One to Marry? Manuel II Palaiologos' Point of View," *BMGS* 31, no. 2 (2007): 146: "The intention of the *Dialogue* was, without doubt, to show how important inheritance was for the imperial family."

99 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, 173.2–10, trans. 172.

with the typical array of maternal virtues and concerns, and when he claims outright that Helena valued the title of “mother” even more dearly than she did her imperial title.¹⁰⁰ Second, Manuel explains quite early that his *Dialogue* is actually a form of theater. One might suppose that the dialogue format of the piece speaks for itself, but just in case this is not enough, Manuel also has his mother remark upon the theatrical nature of their exchanges.¹⁰¹ Third, once mother and son are immersed in discussing marriage, it soon becomes clear that this is not just any dialogue, but an almost perfectly Socratic one, with all the requisite moral overtones and layered meanings. Helena is neither an Aspasia nor a Diotima, but rather Socrates himself. Although retaining a maternal persona in her basic concerns and arguably lacking the superb argumentative skills of Socrates, she nonetheless resembles him closely in a number of ways, including her ability to come from behind and win the argument with her son, her irony and false modesty, and her appeal to absolute truth as well as Manuel’s sense of candor.¹⁰² For his part, Manuel remains the respectful son in the *Dialogue*, while also doubling as a credible clone of one of Socrates’ interlocutors. In the end, however, the surprise and delight readers found in the piece clearly owes much to Manuel’s depiction of Helena, whose character is deeply rooted in a tradition of Byzantine mothers, who were expected to provide moral education and give strong advice to close family members. And yet at the same time she is radically unconventional in her classical philosopher’s costume.

As a measure of how Byzantine writers treated their ordinary mothers in published rhetoric, Manuel’s portrait of Helena appears to reflect an extreme degree of creative, or even theatrical, representation, unlike

the different shades of managed representation present in previous works of its kind. It is easier to take the measure of his *Dialogue* than that of similar works, simply because so many useful points of reference can be established within it, including his stated motives for writing the piece, its audience, the real biographies of the main characters, and the literary parallels and genre he relies upon. But what, besides literary recognition, was Manuel trying to accomplish with the *Dialogue*? If previous motherhood discourses serve as any guide, it seems that Manuel was using well-known maternal imagery to make a specific point about himself. Everyone in his audience knew that he was both an admirable public figure and the desperate empire’s last hope for survival against its enemies. Or as John Barker has concluded, “It is easy to draw general conclusions from the known record of his [Manuel’s] political activity. There he appears to us as a man of great nobility and integrity, a sensitive, responsible, and compassionate ruler of his suffering people, completely realistic about his circumstances, yet at the same time possessing a deep sense of tradition and of the glory of his rank . . . ready to accept with dutiful perseverance the crushing and almost hopeless burden placed upon him.”¹⁰³ Barker goes on to lament the fact that Manuel reveals so little direct information about himself—his genuine thoughts, feelings, and personal character—in the large body of writings he left behind. Although such reticence about personal matters was common among Byzantine authors, Manuel’s case was “particularly acute and also particularly disappointing. Even in his letters the stilted rhetoric only rarely gives way to reveal something of his genuine feeling.”¹⁰⁴ One thing is clear about the emperor’s inner life, however, and that is the persistence of his literary ambitions, which Barker calls “the most striking aspect of Manuel’s personality and activities” and judges as “the cornerstone of his being.”¹⁰⁵ Viewed against this background, the *Dialogue*, which was written when the emperor was middle-aged and already full of disappointments in public life, makes

100 Manuel II Palaiologos, *Dialogue*, 60.1–5, trans. 61 (Helena as moral educator of her children), 70.180–187, trans. 71 (Helena deeply concerned with son’s welfare), 106.849–882, trans. 107–109 (Helena on the joys of being a parent), 60.12–14, trans. 62 (Helena wants to be called “mother”).

101 Ibid., 74.260–61, trans. 75. See also 102.756–60, trans. 103, where Manuel notes how spectators enjoy battles like the one in which he and Helena are engaged.

102 For Helena’s growth and triumph in the debate, compare *ibid.*, 60.1–70.194, trans. 61–71 (playing dumb and on the defensive), 70.94–74.244, trans. 71–75 (agrees to engage in serious debate), 74.255–116.1009, trans. 75–117 (exposition of points and collapse of Manuel’s case). See also 74.252–58, trans. 74 (appeal to truth), and 64.80–81, trans. 65 (appeal to candor). My thanks to Wayne Ambler for his insights and suggestions on these matters.

103 J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969), 400–401.

104 Ibid., 403.

105 For his literary ambitions and output, see *ibid.*, 410–39, with the quotation on p. 410.

sense.¹⁰⁶ Manuel must have envisioned it as a statement about himself and his legacy in at least two ways; first, it was a promising piece of literary craftsmanship to come from an emperor's pen, and he knew it;¹⁰⁷ second, its premise of a mother engaged in a spirited philosophical dialogue with her son allowed Manuel to speak about the life of his mind and heart in ways that escaped him in his other writings. It would be naive to think that the emperor set out to reveal his whole inner self in the *Dialogue*. Yet it would also be a mistake not to note the preceding centuries-long tradition of famous Byzantine authors speaking about their mothers, a tradition that facilitated the kind of personal revelation that Manuel included in his *Dialogue*.

Conclusion

In the concluding remarks of his comprehensive study of Byzantine autobiographical texts, Martin Hinterberger states, "The textual forms which favor autobiographical writing have within themselves an autobiographic potential in the sense that the author and his life-history are, as a rule, bound closely together with the narrative contents which [the text] includes, and [in the sense that] the textual form is thereby clearly well-positioned to allow the author to encode some aspect of his life-experience or to use what he has included in the narrative to hearken back in some fashion to his own life-history."¹⁰⁸ Like Hinterberger's work, the present discussion is basically about how and where one finds self-revelation in Byzantine literature. And although it comes to the same general conclusions Hinterberger does, its approach to self-revelation is more specific, its set of findings is more concrete, and its implications for future research are quite different.

The approach adopted in the pages above differs from much of current Byzantine research on self-revelation in Byzantine literature,¹⁰⁹ and notably Hinterberger's, in three specific respects. First, whereas Hinterberger focused primarily on "I-Narratives" (*Ich-Erzählungen*) that are to be found in autobiographical texts, the present analysis looks at indirect and implied (or embedded) discourses of self-revelation, always narrated in the third person, even in autobiographical texts. Second, instead of seeking out instances of self-revelation within well-known categories of literary genres and sub-genres, here the focus is on a single theme, the theme of motherhood, across textual forms. Third, while self-revelation is the sole focus of Hinterberger's and others' research, the present study has also, by necessity, occupied itself with biographical texts. The biographical texts in question (Chorikios of Gaza's *Funeral Oration*, the *Vita of Martha*, and the *Vita of Alypius*) are of interest because they employ narratives of motherhood to praise indirectly the virtues and character of their biographical subjects. Thus they differ from mother-narratives of an autobiographical nature (Gregory of Nazianzus's *Funeral Orations*, Theodore of Stoudios's *Funeral Oration*, Psellos's *Encomium*, Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, and Manuel II Palaiologos's *Dialogue*) only insofar as the biographical subject differs. But whether it concerns biographical or autobiographical accounts, and whatever the literary genre, the major finding of this study is that the theme of motherhood was full of narrative potential: the actual character and actions of real mothers might not have disappeared altogether in Byzantine accounts of ordinary motherhood, but an evident secondary purpose—amounting to a type of code—was behind them: to shed light on a mother's offspring.¹¹⁰ The portraits of mothers discussed above share enough in common, thematically and rhetorically, to justify the conclusion that using motherhood narratives in this way was more than a matter of chance. Rather, since some of Byzantium's most gifted authors turned to the theme of motherhood with similar secondary agendas, this rhetorical technique was well known and regularly practiced from the

106 Ibid., 417 dates it to 1396.

107 For Manuel's continuous revising of the *Dialogue* after its first publication, see *ibid.*, 431–32, esp. n. 63.

108 Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 383: "Die dem autobiographischen Schreiben übergeordneten Textgattungen verfügen über ein autobiographisches Potential in dem Sinn, daß der Autor und seine Lebensgeschichte in der Regel eng mit dem dargestellten Inhalt verbunden sind und die Textgattung geradezu dadurch charakterisiert ist, daß der Autor Selbsterlebtes einbringt oder bei der Darstellung in irgendeiner Weise auf seine eigene Lebensgeschichte zurückgreift."

109 Cf. above, p. 45.

110 Compare with the type of coding detected by S. Efthymiades and J. M. Featherstone in the funeral orations of Gregory of Nazianzus, Theodore of Stoudios, and Michael Psellos, in which the emphasis was on promoting the sanctity of a blood relative to shed holy light on his or her offspring. See Efthymiades and Featherstone, "Holy Lineage" (n. 59 above), esp. 20–23.

time of Gregory of Nazianzus onward.¹¹¹ Perhaps its origins were even earlier, if the suggestive literary treatments of a select number of Greco-Roman mothers is any guide.¹¹²

Yet the question remains as to why Byzantine authors thought it a good idea to use depictions of mothers to draw attention to their children. Several answers to this question, each with implications for future research, seem appropriate. To begin, one must consider the all-too-obvious fact that this type of public discourse has always existed and probably always will. In any society that values the family and depends upon biological mothers to nurture their young to a significant degree, Byzantium included,¹¹³ there will always be a temptation to relate a child's formative experiences at home to his or her strengths and weaknesses as an adult. To take just one modern example of this universal phenomenon, one of the modern world's most successful political leaders regularly invokes his mother to explain his achieve-

ments and to shed light on the positive sides of his character.¹¹⁴ But in Byzantium there are other, more specific explanations to be considered. Among these is the evident reluctance among Byzantine writers to be charged with speaking idly about themselves (περιαιυτολογία). If such a reluctance helps to explain the relative scarcity of explicit and detailed "I-Narratives" in Byzantine literature on the whole, as may be the case,¹¹⁵ then it stands to reason that the very same fears may have driven authors to seek other outlets for revealing themselves. Several of the texts concerned with motherhood that we have reviewed above are also relatively rich in "I-Narratives."¹¹⁶ The fact that these authors reveal themselves both explicitly (via "I-Narratives") and implicitly (via motherhood narratives) in one and the same text should come as no surprise; for if fears of the accusation of περιαιυτολογία put limits on the one form of discourse, the other allowed the same discourse to continue under a new guise. And what of that guise? What could one say by reference to one's own or someone else's mother that could not be said either fully or clearly enough in direct speech? These questions bring us to one final rationale for maternal discourses: to speak of one's mother was to speak of a set of values and virtues associated with her proper role in life, as opposed to her husband's role, or society's expectations of the role played by a good citizen and Christian. A commitment to the process of learning, an instinct for nurturing and disciplining others, unwavering piety, and an uncompromising, almost indomitable, spirit were among the characteristics epitomized by the mothers depicted in the Byzantine texts discussed above. These were a somewhat unusual set of virtues when considered against the broader scheme of political, ascetical, and generally Christian virtues on display in Byzantine rhetoric in general and

111 Direct and indirect evidence for subsequent authors having read the motherhood narratives of earlier authors is available. Some borrowing is also evident. For Psellos's knowledge of Gregory of Nazianzus's orations, see Criscuolo, *Autobiografia*, 29–44, along with his apparatus criticus 86–89, 107, and Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons*, 36–37 (both n. 15 above). For Anna Komnene's acknowledgement of Psellos's encomium, see *ibid.*, 29. For proof that Theodore of Stoudios read a large number of the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus, hence probably also those about his mother, see G. Fatouros, ed., *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, CFHB 31 (Berlin–New York, 1992), 976. These cases are at least indicative of the attentive reception of early works by later authors.

112 For an overview of motherhood in Rome, see Dixon, *Roman Mother* (n. 46 above) and B. Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships in Roman Society," in *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. B. Rawson (Oxford, 1991). For some inviting accounts, see Plutarch's Volumnia in *The Life of Coriolanus* and his Cornelia in the *Lives of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*, together with the *Funeral Oration for Murius*, in *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, 3rd ed., trans. M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant (London, 2005), 17–18. For motherhood in late antiquity, see C. Atkinson, *The Oldest Profession: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 11–22.

113 For the strong correlation between autobiographical and family narratives, see M. Angold, "Autobiography and Identity: The Case of the Later Byzantine Empire," *BSL* 50 (1999): 44–47; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische* (n. 27 above), 283–87, 388. For the important place of mothers in the late antique and Byzantine household, see G. S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London–New York, 2000), 150–54; P. Hatlie, "The Religious Lives of Children and Adolescents," in *A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 3, *Byzantine Christianity*, ed. D. Krueger (Minneapolis, 2006), 188.

114 S. Berlusconi, "Una mamma come amico," in *Una Storia Italiana* (Milan, 2001), 5–6. For a discussion about Berlusconi's use of his mother Rosa ("Rosella") in political discourse, see, *inter alia*, J. Kramer, "All He Surveys," *The New Yorker* (10 November 2003), 94–105, and F. Ceccarelli, "Silvio fa bene ma lo offendono," *La Repubblica* (8 December 2004).

115 Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic* (n. 8 above), 81–83; Hinterberger, *Autobiographische*, 132–49.

116 Hinterberger, *Autobiographische*, 68–69 (on Gregory of Nazianzus), 152 (on Theodore of Stoudios), 41–43, 152–53, 345–48 (on Michael Psellos), 154, 301–2 (on Anna Komnene).

encomiastic literature in particular.¹¹⁷ Yet, they were both attractive and appropriate for authors who strove to highlight some of the unusually brilliant character traits embodied by their biographical or autobiographical subjects.

The University of Dallas (Rome)
Via dei Ceraseti 12
00040 Frattocchie (Rome) Italy

117 P. J. Alexander, "Secular Biography in Byzantium," *Speculum* 15 (1940): 200–203; Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur* (n. 83 above), 120–32; Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire* (n. 21 above), 81–84, 89–119. More generally, P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988).